

**Abstract 296**

**TITLE:** Education and Constituency Building Around Microbicides

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**ISSUE:** Alternative methods for HIV/STD prevention that can be controlled by a woman (or man) discretely and well in advance of having sex are urgently needed. Community organizing and activism is required to convince legislators, funding agencies, and private industry that microbicide development should be a top priority. Education and outreach in populations at risk can be a tool for building constituencies.

**SETTING:** Microbicides as an Alternative Solution (MAS) is a citizen's advocacy group based in Berkeley, California.

**PROJECT:** MAS was created in 1997 as a voluntary grass-roots organization in response to the apparent need in the San Francisco Bay Area for methods of HIV/STD prevention other than male condoms. Our primary goal is to inform the public, legislators and pharmaceutical companies about the urgent need for alternative HIV/STD prevention products. This goal is supported by educational outreach to help people understand their risk of HIV and STD infection. We are also developing market research protocols to contribute to the growing body of research demonstrating consumer demand and potential market for microbicides.

**RESULTS:** MAS's activities have included presentations to community and college groups, community outreach workers, local radio stations, articles to local papers, participation in workshops, a letter writing campaign and cosponsorship of a global campaign for microbicides. Over 40 local organizations and individuals regularly participate in our activities, including students, community planning groups, health care providers, gay men, HIV positive individuals and women from different SES backgrounds. A quarter of our members became involved after being reached by MAS's educational outreach. Pre-and post-intervention questionnaires showed that college women were better able to identify their risks and 98% reported interest in microbicidal products after MAS's workshop.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Focusing on a product that has yet to be developed presents new challenges for constituency building, but the need for alternative prevention methods is a unifying demand that attracts diverse organizations and individuals. Educational outreach combined with community organizing strategies have helped women and men to identify their risk of infection, and then act on their concern by advocating for prevention alternatives they can control.

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